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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001910

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO FAA, NTSB AND DOT  
DOT FOR KEVIN SAMPLE  
NTSB FOR DENNIS JONES  
STATE FOR AF, AF/W, AF/PAS  
NSC FOR AF DIRECTOR MICHAEL MILLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2007  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: KANO AIR CRASH INVESTIGATION SLOWS; CAUSE  
STILL UNKNOWN

REF: A. ABUJA 1429  
[1B](#). ABUJA 1486

CLASSIFIED BY CDA ANDREWS. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[¶](#)1. (C) Summary. Seven weeks after the May 4 crash of an EAS BAC 1-11 in Kano, the GON response has lost momentum. NTSB investigator Jones indicated official investigation was substandard and likely to produce inaccurate results. Aviation Minister Chikwe continues to change personnel and bruit new policies, more out of concern to manage political fallout than to find the truth. Some of these changes seem positive, but we do not expect most to be significant. Much water has passed under the bridge, so the true causes of the May 4 crash may remain unknown. We should urge the GON to fund oversight properly and to give its oversight body greater independence. End Summary.

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REAL REFORM OR PERFORMING FOR THE PUBLIC  
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[¶](#)2. (U) Minister of Aviation Dr. Kema Chikwe fired over 20 officials in the wake of the May 4 crash at Kano (Ref. A) of a BAC 1-11 operated by Executive Air Services (EAS). The Director General and Director of Airworthiness of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the Directors of Engineering and Administration of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) and two Directors of Air Traffic Services from the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) were among the those receiving pink slips. Media reports suggest others may be on the way.

[¶](#)3. (U) The Minister has also promised to replace all flight instructors at the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) in Zaria with foreign experts, claiming the current instructors are responsible for the failure of NCAT to graduate students.

[¶](#)4. (U) Chikwe has also proposed banning all single aircraft airline companies; they will have the option of merging with other companies or going out of business. Complaining that aircraft vendors in Miami were selling unfit aircraft at low cost to Nigerian airlines, she has proposed that Nigerian buyers obtain a certificate of airworthiness from countries of origin before sales can be completed. Finally the Minister has proposed reducing the number of licenses for aircraft maintenance organizations to 20.

[¶](#)5. (C) Comment: The actions taken by Chikwe are a mixed bag. Banning single aircraft companies could prove useful, but only if proper maintenance regimes are instituted for the remaining airlines. However, Assistant Director Remi Faminu, of the Ministry of Aviation's Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB), believes operators with one craft fleets will lease additional craft as cheaply as possible in order to meet the new minimum requirements. If so, this new regulation has the potential to increase rather than decrease the number of marginal air carriers. Faminu contends the proposal to reduce the number of maintenance organizations is unrealistic. All operators have their own maintenance crews; combining them would be unworkable. Past attempts at similar remedies have failed.

[¶](#)6. (C) Faminu also labeled the firings as purely political. The crash gave Chikwe the opportunity to restructure the affected agencies with fewer accusations than would have been leveled under other circumstances. According to Faminu, the

proposal to staff the NCAT faculty with foreign experts to train pilots is a good one, provided the college can pay market salaries. According to Faminu one major reason for the failure of the flight school is the high turnover of instructors. Nigerian instructors are paid on the Federal compensation scale. They quickly leave NCAT when offered higher paying piloting jobs in the private sector. Finally, evaluating aircraft at the time of sale and guaranteeing their airworthiness is an important step. However, a regime requiring proper maintenance after purchase is equally important.

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AN APPARENT RUSH TO JUDGMENT  
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17. (C) So far only one of the crashed plane's "black boxes" has been found. The Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) is still missing. Dennis Jones, of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), who visited Nigeria May 16-28, accompanied POLCOUNS to a May 20 meeting with Minister Chikwe. She claimed the CVR had been stolen from the crash site. Chikwe also asserted that an engine on the crashed plane had been clandestinely changed during a holiday with no oversight or inspection.

18. (U) In the week after the crash, three separate panels were announced to investigate the crash. Minister Chikwe proposed a twelve-member panel, while the House and the Senate in the National Assembly established separate investigatory committees. These committees were given impractical mandates to complete their investigations in two or three weeks. So far the performance of the committees has been uninspiring. For example the Senate committee used its forum to condemn the conditions of Nigeria's airports which seemed to be more an attempt by some Senators to get advantageous press coverage while trying to roll the political pork barrel their way.

19. (C) Jones, accompanied by Poloff and Econoff, met Director K.K.O. Sagoe, Assistant Director Remi Faminu and Mr. C.O. Awogbami of the AIB May 23. The AIB is the Nigerian counterpart to the NTSB. The Nigerian investigators complained that the three above-mentioned panels were composed of non-professionals who were reaching unreliable conclusions from erroneous assumptions. The National Assembly committees, they believe, are using the tragedy as an opportunity to score political points with their constituencies. Even Chikwe's committee, they claim, did not have sufficient expertise. They also claimed that it was improper for her to constitute such a panel; under Nigerian law, they said, only the Justice Minister can establish such a panel. Moreover, the Justice Minister must wait until after the AIB investigation is completed.

10. (C) While aspersing the special investigations, the AIB's performance has not been exemplary. Faminu is leading the investigation. The AIB team gave us the following preliminary report: The BAC1-11 aircraft traversed the 2600m runway, the 60m of overrun area and an additional unpaved area of 150 meters prior to taking off. This is indicative of low airspeed and points to the likelihood that the aircraft was near stall from the time it took off. The plane most likely went into a deep stall, which on the BAC1-11 can only be recovered by descending nose down for several thousand feet. The aircraft never reached an altitude of greater than a few hundred feet. Sagoe examined the wreckage, and his preliminary finding is that one engine failed. This assessment is based on the way the engines were damaged and the difference in the damage to the two engines.

11. (C) Faminu related some of the difficulties AIB faced in attempting to conduct a thorough investigation. Investigators were unable to survey the crash scene on May 4 because of mobs surrounding the site. Sagoe stated that the first officials at the scene were beaten by the angry mob. Consequently Faminu was unable to make diagrams or take pictures of the initial crash scene. Since much of the crash site was altered before the investigators could examine it, crucial indicators were lost. Faminu hopes the Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) along with cargo weight and exact readouts of weather conditions will reveal the information necessary to help determine what happened. The Ministry does not have the necessary equipment to interpret the recorder data and will likely send it to the UK. Faminu stated in a June 12 conversation that arrangements had been made to send the DFDR to England and that he expected to have results by the end of June. However, the DFDR had not been sent as of June 25.

¶12. (U) Awogbami stated that recordings between the tower and cockpit contained no communication after clearance for takeoff was given. Faminu was unaware if radar readings were available at the time of the crash. (Note: Media and Embassy sources indicate that the radar at the Kano Airport has not functioned for several years. The investigators were either unaware of this or trying to save embarrassment by feigning ignorance. End Note)

¶13. (C) The AIB, remains understaffed, under-funded and under political pressure to find a quick answer. Jones was concerned the political pressure might cause the AIB to perform only a superficial investigation, obscuring the real causes behind the crash. The initial work by AIB investigators has been disappointing. AIB had no photos, or diagrams from the crash site.

¶14. (C) Jones visited the Kano crash site and was able to view the wreckage that had been recovered. While noting that many factors unique to this crash prevented a perfect investigation, Jones also noted the investigators had a surprisingly casual attitude. They lacked enthusiasm and failed to follow up on information. For instance, no attempts at interviewing witnesses were made, and the chief investigator was uninterested in efforts to reconstruct the wreckage. Jones urged the investigators to have the data recorder read and expressed dismay that the investigation was being conducted without the vital information available from this source.

¶15. (C) In Reftel B, Post supported Minister Chikwe's request for assistance investigating the crash. After consulting with Dennis Jones and Kevin Sample of DOT, Post recommended to Minister Chikwe that aviation expert Ron Montgomery serve on the crash investigation panel. However on June 6, the Ministry asked that Montgomery delay his trip -- the panel had been postponed indefinitely. Awodu said that the panel could not be established until completion of the AIB investigation.

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COMMENT  
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¶16. (C) Many hoped the May 4 crash would shake the GON of its lethargy regarding domestic air carriers. Initially, the GON showed energy and said the right things. However, recent signs indicate a flagging commitment. This is all the more tragic since two major crashes have been barely averted, and another small crash, killing five, has taken place since the May 4 crash. While impossible at this date to identify the real causes of the EAS crash, it is not difficult to identify weaknesses in the Nigerian Government's handling of this incident.

¶17. (C) Comment Continued: From all appearances, the Minister of Aviation is more concerned about managing the political fallout than in technical probity. Consequently, efforts to investigate the crash and to examine the flight safety standards of commercial carriers remains subject to political pressures. We should continue to work with the Ministry in its overall modernization program, despite the flaws in its response to the crash. However, this incident underscores the need not only for better funding and training of the AIB but greater independence of the AIB from the Aviation Ministry itself.  
ANDREWS